

# A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

## FLORIDA SUICIDE FACTS

The number of suicides in Florida was almost double the number of homicides the past two years. If you're thinking about suicide, there is help. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

- Suicide is the ninth-leading cause of death.
- In 2006, there were 2,410 suicides, compared with 1,211 homicides.
- In 2007, there were 2,570 suicides, compared with 1,319 homicides.
- People 70 and older have the highest rate of suicide.
- The male suicide rate is 3.6 times that of females.
- White, non-Hispanics commit 84 percent of suicides.

Source: Suicide Prevention Resource Center



## Awareness of the warning signs of suicide may be the difference between survival or a funeral.

*"I was told my son is a hero — that he may have saved a life. In reality, he was one of a number of heroes. A whole group of friends — and friends of friends — took action because they recognized warning signs and they didn't ignore them. Whether having learned the warning signs at school, or through TV or billboard campaigns, it doesn't matter. What matters is that they reached out when a young girl was hurting and may have saved her life.*

*After an argument, the girl went for a walk on her own, and left text messages with friends, saying 'I am sorry, but this is the only way.'*

*Friends began to rally, reaching out to many they had programmed in their cell phones, asking to look for their friend. My son and his friend were the ones who found her, alone and crying. 'We have mutual friends who are worried about you and care for you very much,' my son told her.*

*'They have asked many friends to look for you, so get in the car. I'm taking you home.' She resisted at first, but eventually let them take her home. When my son returned home and told me the story, I was so proud that he reached out. He was even going to contact her parents, if one of her friends hadn't agreed to do so. The circle of friends kept closer-than-usual contact with her for the next several days."*

— Anonymous

By **STEPHEN ROGGENBAUM**  
Special to the Tribune

**W**hen this story was shared with me, I was the one who told the mother her son was a hero. Talking, writing or hinting about suicide is an urgent danger sign, and one of the most important things that helps a person through periods of crisis is their family, friends or community. The suicide last week of 19-year-old Abraham Biggs via a live webcam was an opportunity for any one of 1,500 viewers to intervene.

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## SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

*The American Association of Suicidology has created an easy phrase to remember warning signs: IS PATH WARM? This is something everyone can learn and remember:*

### It stands for:

**I**deation (talking of wanting to hurt or kill himself/herself)

**S**ubstance abuse (increased alcohol or drug use)

**P**urposelessness (no reason for living; no sense of purpose)

**A**nxiety (anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep/sleeping all the time)

**T**rapped (feeling trapped, like there's no way out)

**H**opelessness

**W**ithdrawal (withdrawing from friends, family and society)

**A**nger (rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge)

**R**ecklessness (doing risky activities, seemingly without thinking)

**M**ood changes (dramatic mood changes)

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# WARNING SIGNS

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Suicide is a serious public health issue and challenge for the nation, Florida and our local communities. Florida had nearly twice as many suicides in 2006 and 2007 as homicides, according to the state Office of Vital Statistics.

Depression is common and can be serious when prolonged. Regardless of age, people who are depressed have a higher risk of suicidal behavior. According to the Center for Disease Control's 2008 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance system, within 12 months of the survey about 8 percent of 2007 Florida high school students reported making a suicide plan and nearly 6 percent had attempted suicide. Slightly more than 2 percent of those making an attempt required medical attention.

Preventing suicide is like a puzzle. We are the pieces of

the puzzle. We need to work together — until the pieces of the puzzle come together, until we come together to address this serious issue.

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), 911, or your local mental health care or medical provider.

These are a few ideas on how we can be better prepared to intervene when we see a friend, co-worker, neighbor or relative in distress.

Just as the friends did above, we need to trust our gut feelings. Don't be afraid to tell your friend that you're concerned. This open dialogue can help individuals seek professional help and ultimately, save a life.

*Stephen Roggenbaum is an assistant in research at the University of South Florida's Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute and an inductee into 2008 Who's Who of Prevention Leaders in Florida at the 22nd annual Florida Statewide Prevention Conference.*